Incident-driven democracy at Europe's Edge.
The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Introduction

In February 2014, in the town of Tuzla, an industrial city in Bosnia and Herzegovina[1], workers took the streets and demonstrated against restructuring schemes that had left them unemployed or without any decent wage for several months[2]. What began as a peaceful demonstration in a town known for its tradition of multiculturalism and tolerance soon turned violent. There were clashes with the police and some buildings were set on fire. Other cities in Bosnia, not in the least the capital Sarajevo, followed suit and saw a similar succession of protests and clashes. What did this sudden fit of collective anger mean? For many Bosnians these events had to be read against a larger background of failed transition and halted democratization. The protests were not merely about growing dissatisfaction with the economic policies and privatization schemes that had left some firms in the hands of corrupt elites that took decisions against the interests of their employees; they were also about the state of the democracy more broadly, the general alienation that people felt from those who were elected to govern the country. For many Bosnians they signalled the bankruptcy of twenty years of intense and internationally guided democratization. The violence was not something Bosnians endorsed, but many weren't surprised by it either: in a post-war country where corruption is rife and electoral competition is universally based on ethnic mobilization there seems to be a general expectation that social unrest can derail quickly.

It is with this context in mind that we have to understand the events that happened soon *after* the violent incidents: the swift organizing, by groups of volunteers, of a number of citizens' assemblies. These gatherings were called

plenums and functioned as temporary and improvised channels of political participation for ordinary citizens. Radically bottom-up, radically open to every citizen, explicitly not tied to any ethnicity, economic sector or interest group, and not aimed at any direct engagement with the classic channels of political participation, these plenums were a new form of civic action in Bosnia. Everyone who wanted to participate was welcome, and everyone who wanted to speak was welcome to speak. This was politics outside anything that was usually seen as politics – outside elections and even outside the world of organized civil society.

In this article we focus on the potential value of incident-driven forms of civic democratization, of which the plenums in Bosnia are an important – albeit temporary – example, in the context of post-conflict democratization attempts.

So far democratization literature has focused mostly on the classical channels of political participation, especially in the context of discussions on international democracy promotion and state-building[3,4,5,6]. In places that have experienced ethnic conflict, such attempts usually mean the formation of a system of government that tries to appease the formerly warring factions. Such strong emphasis on (one might even say preoccupation with) conflict-settlement comes with a price: lessons from democratization processes in more established and peaceful democracies are usually not taken to be relevant. It is as if only advanced democracies should engage in new forms of citizens' participation, and as if only established democracies can afford themselves to think about how to move beyond the limits of elections, party politics and organized civil society. Post-conflict societies apparently need to stick to old recipes for democratization, even if they don't lead to much result. We believe, however, that the plenums in Bosnia demonstrate the importance of imaging democracy differently also in post-conflict places. Moreover, they give us cause to give more attention to democratic experimentation in post-conflict places in our thinking about democracy more in general. Violent incidents in post-conflict societies expose the need to introduce new forms of democracy there *and* they show how urgent it might be to assess critically current notions of democracy and democratization even in established democracies. In the case of Bosnia, we see how new forms of democratization are enacted and staged by citizens

themselves, outside of any initiative by the state, international community or organized civil society. Of course, these plenums alone couldn't be expected to provide a sufficient remedy for the dysfunctions of the Bosnian state. But they did show that experiments in citizens-driven democracy are not merely the expression of a naïve longing for some far-off ideal; they can be practical ways to set minds in motion and move matters forward towards that ideal, even in the most unlikely of circumstances.

In the first section of this article we reflect on why the classical recipes for democratization have failed in Bosnia. We start with the Dayton accords but take also a broader literature on civil society and international supervision into account. Not only has democratization been halted by ethnic constitutionalism and the politics of transition, corruption and partycracy that has emerged from it; it has also been hindered by the narrow ways in which organized civil society, supported by international agencies, has operated so far.

In the second part of the article we offer an overview of the developments after February 2014. What were the plenums, and how should we understand their value in the context of the constraints inherent to classic democratization strategies? Our comments are based on fieldwork in Sarajevo and Tuzla in February 2014 – work that included interviews with activists and participant observation at the Sarajevo plenum meeting of February 17th and the street protests in the days following. We also conducted interviews with Bosnian activists involved in the protests and plenums on several occasions over the course of 2014[7].

In the third part of the article we broaden the scope, offer a theoretical interpretation of the problem of democratic exhaustion, and see the case of Bosnia in the context of a wider reflection on the role of incidents and imaginations in the advancement of democratization in Europe and beyond.

1. Democratization failed

A constitution and its discontents

A number of social scientists have suggested the term "*ethnopolis*" to describe the internationally supervised constitutional arrangements made through the Dayton Peace Agreements (and adjusted in later stages) and the constraining features of the electoral competition that has been built on that basis. Mujkić[8], for example, uses this term to talk about the tendency towards exclusive collectivist representation and the strong emphasis on ethnic affiliation that is pervasive across the political system. These traits discourage civic initiatives that crosscut ethnic divides, and as a result citizens feel disempowered. Free and fair elections only encourage them to frame their political preferences even more in ethnic ways.

How has Bosnia arrived in this situation? After the war Bosnia was given a system of "power-sharing," a form of democracy that guaranteed the different recognized groups an equal share of power (our discussion is based on a more elaborate treatment of the topic in Touquet and Vermeersch 2007)[9]. We can characterize the system by locating it on a spectrum between two ideal-type systems of power-sharing: consociationalism (a term mostly associated with the work of Lijphart)[10] and integrative power-sharing (a term mostly associated with the work of Horowitz)[11,12,13].These two ideal types differ mostly as to whether and how ethnic differentiation is built into the electoral system. Lijphart has generally emphasized the importance of recognizing ethnic groups as the cornerstones of government. Ethnic conflicts, in his view need to be solved by stimulating processes of cooperation between elites organized in institutions that explicitly acknowledge the differences between ethnic groups. In a consociational system, therefore, governmental power is shared by the different ethnic groups that were previously part of the conflict, and sharing happens through, for example, a grand coalition in parliament or a common presidency; each group has a certain degree of autonomy (groups decide for themselves on issues which are not of common interest); there is proportionality on all levels, including in the civil service and the distribution of public funds; and there is veto power for minorities. Horowitz's integrative option, on the other hand, starts from the premise that institutions need to be designed to encourage intra-ethnic competition and, therefore, he advocates a system that forces ethnic and

nationalist parties to soften their stances and tout voters from across the ethnic spectrum *before* government formation.

Although some of the provisions of the Dayton Agreements could be read as an attempt to introduce integrative elements (such as, for example, its provisions dealing with the importance of the return of refugees in order to restore the multi-ethnic composition of certain regions), on the whole the system is mainly a consociationalist. This solution was preferred on the basis of the dominant view that the nature of the conflict had been ethnic and that none of the ethnic parties could claim a victory. The negotiators at the time tried to meet the wishes of the Bosnian Serbs on the one hand (who wanted a republic of their own) as well as the Bosniaks and the Croats on the other hand (who were in favor of a multi-ethnic state). The most significant consociational element introduced by Dayton was the strong decentralization of government. As a result, the central institutions of the Bosnian state are very weak, whereas the regional entities (the Bosnian-Croat Federation, and within that the cantons of the Bosnian-Croat Federation, and the Republika Srpska) have relative wide powers. As the most important governing bodies on the federal level the system introduced a collective presidency, a bicameral federal parliament and a council of ministers.

Through its emphasis on power-sharing mechanisms Dayton pragmatically recognized segregated ethnic enclaves as the central loci of political authority. The structure of the Bosnian state turned out to be highly decentralized and asymmetrical: the Federation has been split up in cantons and municipalities, whereas there is no such division in Republika Srpska[14]. The overall result is that the biggest concentration of power is to be found on the levels that are deemed the most ethnically homogenous and where the chances of conflicts arising are deemed to be the smallest: the level of the entity in Republika Sprska and level of the cantons or municipalities in the Federation. Other elements of the power-sharing principle that make Bosnia into an ethnicized state are the minority veto for vital issues and the principle of proportionality on all levels[15].

It is clear that we need to understand the introduction of this complex power-sharing system with its fine-tuned territorial divisions and ethnic rules as

related to an overwhelming concern to tame ethnic groups and end (and prevent) ethnic conflict. But with this taming and prevention has come a deeply entrenched ethnicized institutional framework that has not only turned out to be useful for those who want to build their power on ethnic constituencies but also spectacularly ill-fit to foster further democratization and crassly inapt to create country-wide programs for socio-economic justice. As a result mass discontent and protest has emerged on themes that crosscut ethnic divisions. And not surprisingly, any insurgency against any type of policy, no matter on what level of government, has often been faced with ethnic recuperation on some level. Even when concerns underlying protest movements have not be inspired by any 'ethnic claims', they have been easily translated or reduced into such ethnic claims by governing elites and the media. Translating social dissatisfaction into ethno-national resentment has been a key strategy for the governing elites throughout the post-Dayton era[16], and one can easily see why this has been the case. The current system simply encourages such translation because through such an operation contentious issues can be evacuated outside of the domain of country-wide responsibilities and solidarities. And this, in turn, allows politicians to refocuses on the competition between the territorial units of the Bosnian state – the building blocks of the electoral system – which are also ethnic units.

The question then is, to what extent does the straight jacket of the institutional system in Bosnia still allow room for further democratization? Or, more accurately, what types of political or social action may escape or move beyond the logic of the ethnopolis? Perhaps there is something to be expected from non-ethnic political parties and civil society initiatives?

Outside the ethnopolis: attempts to move politics and social protest beyond ethnicized structures

After the fall of the Berlin wall a large literature discussed recipes for democratization and market transition. Linz and Stepan[17], for example, talk about five necessary domains: a free civil society, an autonomous and valued political society (with parties, elections, legislatures, etc.), rule of law, a usable bureaucracy, and an institutionalized economic society that mediates between

the state and the market. But in several ways, the Bosnian story shows that today, twenty years after Dayton, democratization needs to be regarded as a much more elusive affair. We need to look beyond Linz and Stepan's checklist.

This is clear, for example, from considering parties and elections. Party politics and elections in Bosnia have been overseen and monitored by international agents for two decades now, but still party competition can hardly be seen as key contributor to the further development of a healthy democracy. Party membership in Bosnia may be relatively widespread but this is obviously linked to the large amount of clientelism and corruption that happens through political parties[18]. At first sight, the country does not appear to suffer greatly from the mass withdrawal from electoral politics and political parties that has characterized Western liberal democracies over the recent years[19] (turnout figures during Bosnian elections may be low but not as low as in Western liberal democracies); but what has come instead is not less worrying: party involvement for the wrong reasons.

There have been attempts to escape this vicious circle, notably some political parties themselves. Some political parties have sought to go beyond ethnic divisions (and beyond the ethnocratic logic of party competition), but they have generally not fared well. While the Social Democratic SDP has had members in both entities and has nominally been multi-ethnic for quite some years now, its major bases of support have remained limited to the urban centres of the Bosniak-Croat Federation; in 2008 it effectively sided with the Bosniak political parties SDA and SBiH during constitutional reform talks[20]. Opposition party Naša Stranka (NS) so far represents the most successful attempt at mobilizing cross-ethnically – it entered politics during the local elections of 2008 and went on to make a difference in some municipalities – but on a country-wide scale the party has remained firmly stuck in the margins. Interestingly, NS has tried to mobilize citizens not only cross-ethnically but also against Bosnian party politics as a whole, or more precisely, against the system of ethnicized clientalism, patronage and corruption that, on a practical level, party politics has become. This has proven a difficult and paradoxical stance for NS to uphold: while being a political party itself it tried to mobilize on the basis of a call of resistance *against* all party politics[21]

One could therefore argue that the problem of Bosnian party politics extends the problem of ethnicization – the ramifications go much further and must make one wonder if any type of democratizing reform can ever be expected from a political party. The parliamentary elections of October 2014, for example, brought some of the usual elites back to power, and these were to a large extent once again those elites supported by the same ethnic constituencies as in previous elections. But the deeper issue is that even if these powerholders would not be genuine ethnonationalists, they would still have almost no incentives to break the logic of the ethnocratic system; it simply offers them too much of a comfortable array of possibilities to gain access to power. And hence the policy-making status quo remains. As Bieber formulated it in the aftermath of the 2014 elections: "A central feature of Bosnian politics that has contributed to the sense of disempowerment among many citizens has been the perception that nobody ever loses office and everybody is in power somewhere"[22].

If party politics doesn't hold much promise for the advancement of democratization, perhaps we should look at civil society? But a solution providing civic empowerment seems not to be found in the world of organized civil society either. Not only have many NGOs, like political parties, been obsessed by identity politics[23], they have also created a self-sustaining economic system that has lost the ability to critically address the shortcomings of party politics. Some speak of the "NGO-ization" of Bosnia – i.e. the expansion of an internationally supported NGO sector that has come to fill the gap of a lacking civil sphere with massive international support and has thereby also, in a way, created the impression that the only legitimate way of organizing such a civil sphere is through foreign aid programs.

Small wonder then that social protests have become so important for many people who hope for some kind of democratic culture on a larger scale. Until recently, however, the story of mass protests as a potential source of democratization was not a happy story either. The trouble with social protest was that it was easily stripped from its power to build cross-ethnic support by media and politicians who reframed such protests as ethnic. They could in many cases do that so easily because the causes brought to the fore by these protesters where issues that had already been framed in ethnic terms through party

competition; these were issues that were, on a deeper level, already ethnicized before they could even become a source of protest. In June 2013, for example, there were mass protests against the government's failure to adopt legislation on citizens' ID (the so-called "JMBG movement", named after the name of the law on *jedinstveni matični broj građana* – unique citizens' ID number). But this had been an ethnically contentious issue in parliament (a dispute about politicians of the Republika Srpska and the Federation about whether the new regulation should include references to entity borders) already before the protests started; and while the protests explicitly sought to overcome ethnic divisions, they didn't manage to maintain this image in the context of strong party recuperation tactics[24].

2. Incidents, accidents, and plenums

How are the plenums that began in February 2014 different? Did they offer more hope and make the advancement towards a fully functioning democracy more realistic?

The incidents that preceded the plenums did not, at the time, give much reason to suspect that they would increase chances for substantive democratic reform. To be sure, they were large-scale and massive, but that wasn't what made them qualitatively different from previous protests. Indeed, in some ways, the protests of February 2014 and the violent clashes that followed can still be catalogued under the same rubric as earlier episodes of social unrest. What drove these protests might not have been in the first place a direct attack on Dayton as a principle, but like earlier instances of protest, they were expressions of a deep distrust in government as a whole, and in particular, in the principles and practices of economic policy implemented by these governments. The demonstrations and strikes started in response to dysfunctions at specific factories (especially in Tuzla, in companies such as Dita, Polihem, Guming and Konjuh), but they soon caught on a larger symbolic meaning as anti-government protests. They started to represent general feelings of discontent not only with factory management boards but also with the economic and political transition policies of the various governments that had allowed and stimulated

dysfunctional governance at the level of the companies. Earlier protest movements in Bosnia had followed a similar trajectory: dissatisfaction with a particular issue had merged into broader protests directed against (local, entity-level, state-wide and international) governmental agencies.

But in this case, partly because of the heavy violence – which was much heavier than in any earlier episode of social unrest – and partly because of the active concern of various activists who had been close observers of new styles of protests in other post-Yugoslav countries (student demonstrations and occupy movements in Zagreb and Belgrade), the trajectory didn't stop there. The short wave of demonstrations and violence was followed, not only by the usual attempts at ethnic reframing by powerholders and other ethnopolitical entrepreneurs, but also by a sustained attempt at building a novel tradition of democratic politics parallel to elections, party politics and mass protest – primarily in Tuzla, where the strikes of workers had started and where the violence had been most visible, but later on also in Sarajevo, Zenica, Mostar, Jajce, and Brčko.

People gathered in public spaces where they could speak their mind before a public of peers on any topic they deemed important. The technique was akin to that of "open space technology"[25], but it also relied implicitly on some deliberative traditions from Yugoslav times (the self-management board meetings). One of the facilitators of the meetings in Tuzla has described these plenums as "public gatherings, open to any citizen, through which collective decisions and demands can be made and action taken, beyond guarantees of leadership. They are open, direct, and transparent democracy *in practice*."[23]. Every citizen was invited to participate, and everyone was given the right to speak two minutes about anything they wanted to talk about. The method chosen for this political action, and the radical openness undergirding the organization of it, made it stand out of the earlier protest repertoire. Eric Gordy describes the importance of the plenums as follows: "Through the formation of citizens' plenums generating and articulating demands by means of a direct democratic procedure, the protest movement achieved two milestones: it moved protests away from the streets where they were vulnerable to being discredited, and it took the production of the movement agenda out of the hands of the

dominant political parties where they could be detourned and deprived of significance"[23].

Of course, this did not mean that there were no attempts done to bring the incidents, the clashes and the plenums back onto more familiar ethnic terrain. As Emir Hodžić writes: "politicians [were] fostering ethnic tensions and most of the mainstream media [were] reporting on hooliganism, attacks on democracy, coup d'état and other types of insidious nonsense, [while] volunteers proceeded to find a location for the first citizens' plenum."[23]. But what made matters different for the plenums was that they had something more to offer then merely mass protest and party politics, and for that very reason managed to escape some of the preformatted protest-politician scenarios.

During the gatherings citizens talked about policies and reforms – most notably they brought socio-economic issues high on to the agenda – and recommendations were made and communicated to government representatives (and in some cases they had some level of influence); but the significance and importance of the plenums lies also with their format: the fact that they offered a novel method of politics – indeed redefined politics – created trust among participants, and provided the space to facilitate talk among equal citizens. However brief, they managed to create a specific site for democratic politics – a place of democratic refuge – where "the position of victimhood was discarded" and where a "renewed enthusiasm and energy"[23] for politics was created and experienced.

3. Incident-driven democratization: from pressure valves to imaging democracy

It's worthwhile to try and read the story of the plenums against the background of the traditional literature on democratic participation. For many scholars the creation of a democratic system by necessity entails the incorporation of various "pressure valves." Even if social movements or protest groups were mostly ignored in the initial drawing plans for the democratic edifice, they are by now considered essential coping stones at the central axis preventing it from collapse. In his book *Contre-démocratie* the French political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon[26],

for example, argues that countervailing powers are necessary to compensate for the low levels of faith contemporary citizens have in traditional forms of democratic representation. If we have social movements to take tabs on political parties or successfully monitor corruption, we can trust that the "rascals" will restrain themselves[27]. We find a similar line of thinking in the work of Harvard scholar Pippa Norris[28], who made the point that data displaying diminishing voter turnout or decreasing political trust don't tell us the whole story; there has been a steep increase in other forms of political activity, such as petitioning or demonstrating. Norris speaks of a "democratic phoenix" that arises from its ashes: this is democracy but in a new form. Although none of these authors discards the need to have a well-functioning traditional representational system, they claim that if such a system is encapsulated in a thick duvet of other political activities, it will keep functioning even if it is trimmed to the bone.

But what does that say about Bosnia? It seems the main currents of thinking about the hidden resilience of democracy are empirically based on western democracies and some of their central tenets seem to come down when we try to apply them to new democracies.

First of all, authors such as Pippa Norris[27] or Russel Dalton[29] insist (on the basis of elaborate survey material) that, even though citizens are less likely to vote or participate in traditional political forms, their distrust only pertains to those who do the governing (the actors); their faith in the underlying democratic structure, in contrast, is stable, or even increasing. Indeed, they find that young citizens in the US and Europe are among the most ardent adherents of the democratic ideal. But as we explained earlier, in Bosnia there are multiple indicators to show that many citizens have few illusions about the system as a whole. A survey from 2014, conducted with support from the EU, shows that in Bosnia distrust of the state government was at almost 80% and distrust of political parties almost 90%[30]. Such high numbers indicate a deep malaise in the functioning of current democratic institutions in Bosnia.

Second, even though citizens in Western Europe will act through organizations and movements that are not part of the national political system sensu stricto, the aim in the end is still to influence the traditional political representatives. Swedish political scientists Narud and Esaiasson[31] use the term

'between-election democracy' to refer to the kind of democracy that lets citizens interact with their elected representatives through all kinds of parallel channels. This implies that these channels (such as NGOs or institutionally sanctioned social movements) are considered legitimate second-order representatives and political representatives will listen to citizens' demands voiced through them. When citizens lack faith in social movements and discern no possibility to have any impact through them, this alternative route to democratic representation becomes a very dusty road indeed.

Due to the pervasive ethnicization of all public life in Bosnia, these movements there, including broad forms of "civil society," are seldom seen as representative of any group broader than an ethnically defined constituency. Moreover, due to the colonization of civil society by international organizations and donors, faith in these movements and organizations is much lower than in Western democracies, and often they are seen as representatives of the interest of these international organizations rather than of those of the citizens of Bosnia. In former communist states civil society in general has less support and impact on politics and policymaking than in Western societies, but even by those standards the problem in Bosnia is stark. As Rupnik[32] remarked with regard to CEE countries, the lack of "*corps intermédiariers"* in these countries means there is no real counterweight when things go wrong within formal institutions or when the country takes a more authoritarian turn. In CEE countries, the focus has been on installing constitutional democracy and free markets, but without citizens' participation and a strong civil society, the democratization process becomes a precarious exercise. Both organized civil society and citizens' participation are indispensable for perpetuating democracy after it is formally installed. In the Bosnian case, the survey mentioned above also found that half of the population has only 'low' or 'absolutely no' faith in NGOs or humanitarian organizations. In Bosnia the so-called democratic phoenix has clipped wings.

All of this is to show that the literature on democratic representation and social movements seems to have no real answer as to what happens if a crisis occurs in a situation where the "pressure valve" option is not present. In situations where the state is not receptive to input by movements (or in this case, movements are just not deemed relevant for policy drafting), social

movement literature predicts a higher occurrence of more intense and possibly even violent protest[33]. This is exactly what we have seen in the Bosnian case, where workers took the streets in an unorganized fashion and some rioters attacked government buildings. But the demonstrations of February 2014 – and indeed, all the social protests that had preceded them – hardly gave hope to democratic activists that they would enable them to break the existing gridlock of the etnopolis.

Hence the current stalemate: the social crisis has mobilized people in various ways but has offered them few (perhaps no) democratic tools to send their contention into the channels of the policymaking process that might lead to meaningful reforms. One could call this a situation of "democratic exhaustion"[34]: the belief in democracy as an ideal is still somehow present, especially among activists, but after many years of all sorts of movement activities, citizens feel they have not moved much further in the direction of a well-functioning democratic state.

Usually, when an incident or social crisis occurs in a political environment that suffers from "democratic exhaustion," it leaves activists with two options: they can either persevere in their hope on the traditional linkage function between movement and political representational system, or they can divert from democracy as an ideal. In Bosnia the attempt has been to find yet another way.

This has hardly been self-evident. During a workshop in Amsterdam, activists and scholars Nenad Stojanović and Svjetlana Nedimović[35] described in stark terms the disillusion with democratization in Bosnia present among those who took part in the demonstrations in Tuzla and other cities. On top of their discontent with national institutions has come their despair with regard to the democratic deficit in international organizations present in the country. Moreover, part of the economic crisis that triggered the unrest was related to diminishing international aid and the retreat of organizations, which took with them the jobs that they had created earlier (from administrators to cleaners). So why should citizens have faith in policy statements issued through these national and international institutions? What is remarkable about the plenums in Bosnia

is that they showed that many people still believe in democracy as an end goal – even they are fed up with democratization as it has happened so far.

The Bosnian activists who were committed to the plenums have understood that to start restoring democratic faith it's necessary to step out of the existing political order (even if only for a limited time) and reinvent the democratic process in a way that reflects deeper democratic hopes. In a situation where repetitive actions have led to few result, citizens need to see the democratic ideal materialized; only in this way they can keep believing that the ideal somewhere at the horizon still exists and is not just a mirage. Anthropologist Donald Greaber has described a similar process in the run-up to Occupy Wall Street: activists had tried in vain to use traditional linkage methods in what he calls "endless attempts to kick off a national movement"[36]. The only possibility left over was to persuade fellow citizens that a truly democratic society was still possible. Graeber describes how the core activists realized that simply talking about this would not be sufficient. "But it was possible to show them. The experience of watching a group of a thousand, or two thousand people, making collective decisions […] motivated only by principle and solidarity, can change one's fundamental assumptions about what politics […] could actually be like." Such a moment of democratic imagination, or rather imagining democracy, can be found in several movements now that have faced a gridlock in the political order or experienced a complete lack of responsiveness of the political system. The G1000 in Belgium in 2011, a national citizens' summit, came about only when traditional channels for political participation – in this case, the federal elections of 2010 and the party talks about institutional reform that followed it – had left the country stuck in a situation of seemingly endless government negotiations[37].

There is a dialectic relationship between the far-off democratic ideal and its practical implementation that becomes highly visible at specific moments and specific places, such as during the plenums, the G1000 or the deliberative meetings in Zucotti Park. The distant democratic ideal is what inspires the concrete manifestations of these processes. Even if they are short-lived or do not achieve specific policy results, they have given an inward message that might re-

inspire activists and a message to the outside world that some alternative form of political order can not only be dreamed of, but is actually realizable.

Of course, such initiatives have not remained without serious criticism, even from supporters. One complaint with regard to the Occupy movements, for example, is that they were, as Lawrence Weschler has formulated it, "unable (and indeed intentionally, theoretically, insistently unwilling) to coalesce around a unified set of demands that might in turn force a brace of legislative ultimatums, which in turn might set the stage for electoral contests with the horizon of any sort of real contest for power"[38]. True as this is, deliberative settings like the plenums are not aimed to engage people in the power struggle of elections; they want to realize another form of politics, create a new arena and make that into the "real contest". They aim to legitimize, and ultimately give power to, forms of democratic participation outside elections.

Conclusion

What we have observed in Bosnia has implications for broader debates about democracy and democratization.

Over the recent years, several instances of social protest in Europe have transformed into new initiatives for citizens' participation and experiments of direct democracy. In Greece, for example, public squares became first sites of protest but later spaces to hold popular assemblies, not unlike what happened in Turkey during the 2013 protests on Gezi Park in Istanbul. In Belgium and Ireland citizens' summits, such as the G1000 (Belgium 2011) or the Constitutional Convention (Ireland 2013) became new large-scale forms of deliberative democracy after episodes of crisis and protest. While still involving parliamentary-like settings, these incident-driven forms of democracy were attempts to reinvent political engagement of citizens beyond protest and outside the classic institutions of representative democracy – often also outside elections, and outside the realm of the national state, or at least in response to a heightened awareness of critical needs on the local, regional or global scale outside the national state institutions. These instances came about after serious strain was put on the existing political system in these countries, sometimes as a

result of these countries' involvement in the global system. But rather than entering the institutionalized politics of strategic bargaining and fixed collective preferences, citizens searched for new opportunities to engage with politics through their voice, their arguments and narratives.

While many may deplore increasing citizen disengagement from and disillusionment with the formal structures of representative democracy or the lack of enthusiasm of citizens for elections and political parties in a democratizing state (or these citizens' interest in political parties only for reasons of clientelism and personal gain), it is exactly such frustration, disengagement and disillusionment that may be the beginning of an alternative form of democratic engagement. Incident-driven civic actions and spaces can let people experience democracy in new ways and set it as an example to populations who do not live in a democracy yet. This is exactly what happened in the case of the Bosnian plenums in 2014. These actions reified, even if only for a brief moment, a possible political future. In a state where classical recipes for democratization have failed, they were a visible instigator of further democratization. They were a bold stride towards a democratic model that still needs to be created.

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References and Notes

[1] In the rest of the paper we use the name Bosnia as shorthand for the official name of the country, *Bosna i Hercegovina* (BiH).

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[14] This asymmetry is partly a result of the history of the Bosnian conflict. Republika Srpska is the successor of the Bosnian Serb Republic which was founded in the beginning of the war. The Bosniak-Croat Federation, on the other hand originated in the Washington Agreement, which made an end to the Bosniak-Croat conflict.
[15] The federal presidency, for example, consists of three members, one of each ethnic group. Every eight months, the members rotate. The presidents are chosen per entity by direct vote. Decision-making in the presidency is by consensus, but each member has a veto by which he can block any decision that is in conflict with the vital issues of the ethnic group he belongs to. The decision is then presented to the parliament of Republika Srpska or the Croation or Bosniak delegates in the Federation's house of peoples, where decisions can be rejected by a two-third majority. For years now, the federal presidency in Bosnia has been central to a controversy about its ethnic composition. A court case before the European Court of Human Rights in 2009 (Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina) judged the regulation in violation with the European Convention of Human Rights and since then debates have followed about changing the election provisions for the presidency.
[16] S. Jansen (2014) Can the Revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina Send a Message to the Wider World? *Balkan Insight*, February, pp. 1–3. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/can-the-revolt-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-send-a-message-to-the-wider-world.
[17] J. J. Linz and A. Stepan (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
[18] The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report from 2011 showed that "on the occasion of the last national elections held in Bosnia and

Herzegovina 15 per cent of citizens were asked to vote for a certain candidate or political party in exchange for a concrete offer, such as money, goods or a favour, while in the case of local elections to the percentage was slightly lower (13%). These illicit offers seem to happen slightly more often in rural areas" (UNODC 2011, 32). Obviously, corruption in Bosnia is not limited to political parties. It's a pervasive phenomenon in a lot of sectors and has for many people become a normal hazard; many may also rely on it as a survival strategy. According to the UNODC report in 2011 more than one fifth of the Bosnian citizens was forced to pay illegally for a service. A lot of these bribes went to medical doctors and police officers.

[19] P. Mair (2006) Ruling the Void? *New Left Review*, **42**, pp. 25–51.

[20] H. Touquet (2011) Multi-Ethnic Parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Naša Stranka and the Paradoxes of Postethnic Politics. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism,* **11**(3), pp. 451–467.

[21] for more on NS see Touquet, 2011.

[22] F. Bieber (2014) Elections in Bosnia—Business as Usual? *Balkan Insight*, October, pp. 1–2. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/elections-in-bosnia-business-as-usual.

[23] D. Arsenijević (2014) *Unbribable Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Fight for the Commons* (Baden-Baden: Nomos).

[24] R. Toè (2013) Bebolucija: Spring Delayed. *Osservatorio Balcani E Caucaso*, July, pp. 1–3.

[25] See e.g. http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm

[26] P. Rosanvallon (2006) *La Contre-Démocratie, Essai Sur La Société De Défiance* (Paris: Du Seuil).

[27] Rosanvallon also warns, however, that although pressure valves might be a solution to a lot of current democratic disaffection, they also run the risk of supporting populism or leading to increased political cynicism in the long run.

[28] P. Norris (2002) *Democratic Phoenix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[29] R. J. Dalton (2008) *The Good Citizen* (London: SAGE).

[30] Analitika (2014) *Fact Sheet: Survey Results: High Degree of Distrust in Political Parties and Government Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

[31] H. M. Narud and P. Esaiasson (2013) *Between-Election Democracy: the Representative Relationship After Election Day* (Colchester: ECPR).

[32] J. Rupnik (2007) From Democracy Fatigue to Populist Backlash. *Journal of Democracy,* **18**(4), pp. 17–25.

[33] H. Kriesi, R. Koopmans, J. W. Duyvendak and M. G. Giugni (1995) *New Social Movements in Western Europe: a Comparative Analysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

[34] Rupnik (2007) uses the term "Democracy fatigue" to describe a similar state

[35] workshop on Democratic Renewal at the Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, on May 21st, 2014. For an interview with Nedimović see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmlnfwlIoGA

[36] D. Graeber (2013) *The Democracy Project* (London: Penguin).

[37] P. Vermeersch (2012) Deliberative democracy in Belgium. In: G. M. Carney and C. Harris (eds.), *Citizens' Voices: Experiments in Democratic Renewal and Reform* (Dublin: Political Studies Association of Ireland), pp. 8–15.

[38] L. Weschler (2015) Occupy May Be About to Win Its First National Election - in Greece. *Salon.com*, January, pp. 1–2.

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